

## PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

Professional doctorates are validated programmes within the PGT modular system, characterised by credit accumulation and the use boards to confirm grades. Award external examiners oversee student progression on the structured theory/professional practice modules through the Professional Doctorate Modules Boards and the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board.

Professional Doctorates develop competence and skills to advance professional development, research and leadership within a professional field. The programme of study is situated within professional practice, and students will be required to show evidence that, through the course of their studies, they have made a significant contribution to working practices within their professional area.

In order to meet the requirements of professional bodies, some programmes will include work-based learning, alongside research and taught study. Candidates will be expected to make a contribution to professional knowledge and practice and evidence this within academic and research submissions.

There are other aspects of these programmes that mirror the experience of traditional research students and follow URC procedures, including the submission of a research thesis and the appointment of internal and external examiners specifically to examine the research thesis. The examiners submit a preliminary written report on the thesis and students undergo a *viva voce* examination with these examiners in the presence of an independent chair. The external examiner for the thesis is distinct from the subject and award examiners and is selected for her/his expertise in the research area.

### Approval of Professional Doctorate Courses

A proposal for a Professional Doctorate course will be considered through the University's usual course approval processes. The Panel will include a member of the University's Research Policy Unit nominated by the Dean of Research. An appraisal of the suitability of the research environment of the group proposing the course will be part of the considerations. The panel may include representatives from professional or regulatory bodies, as necessary.

### Governance Structure for Professional Doctorate Courses

A Professional Doctorate course comprises both a taught component, (Stage 1) and a research component (Stage 2). Both stages are managed by a Course Leader, and overseen by an overall Award external examiner. However, decisions regarding admissions, progression and awards are handled by different committees for each Stage. The Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board will oversee Stage 1 assessments of all Professional Doctorates

The University's Research Awards Sub-committee (RASC) is responsible for overseeing Stage 2 of the course, ensuring that the doctoral standard of the award is maintained.

RASC has authority to ratify the recommendation of the thesis examiners for onward transmission to the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board who confer the award of Professional Doctorate to students who have successfully completed the prescribed course of study.

### The Professional Doctorate Award

Professional doctorates are structured doctoral programmes that address substantial aspects of theory, practice and research. They are equivalent in time, intellectual demand and academic outcomes to those of a traditional PhD.

Each programme will be assessed in relation to level "D" outcomes as defined in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

All aspects of the programme should be integrated and assessed in a doctoral thesis. The thesis normally represents a major proportion of the doctoral phase of each professional doctorate programme.

**Programme structure**

Professional doctorates are credit rated and modular, with an emphasis on professionally-relevant and practice-oriented independent learning and research that together make an original contribution to knowledge. As for other research degree programmes, each student is involved in the identification of individual targets and outcomes.

At validation, an interim award(s) will be identified for all professional doctorate programmes. This will normally be a defined Masters level award or, where appropriate, a professional qualification.

Professional doctorate programmes have a credit rating of 540 credits of which a maximum of 180 credits may be at level 7. A minimum 360 credits are at level 8 (Doctoral or “D” level), with assessment reflecting the QAA doctoral outcomes as indicated in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework. They are normally organised into two stages (Stage 1 taught and Stage 2 research) with progression determined on completion of each stage of the programme.

Within the overall 540 credits:

- A maximum of 240 credits will be derived from taught modules (level 7 & 8) assessing structured or professional aspects of the programme, including the creation and interpretation of new knowledge in professional contexts.
- A minimum of 300 credits of the programme will be based on an individually negotiated investigative research project.

A University of Wolverhampton Professional Doctorate course will comprise two stages:

- **Stage 1:** Assessed taught modules, developing professional and research skills; to include the development and approval of a proposal for independent research in Stage 2
- **Stage 2:** Independent, supervised research - May include in addition a practice-based component with students evidencing the advancement of professional knowledge through case based research and/or academic scholarship.

Normally, these stages are sequential, and a student progresses to stage 2 when stage 1 is completed. However, due to requirements of professional bodies and the needs of certain professions, it is possible that stages 1 and 2 are concurrent. Justification of this arrangement will be provided in the validation documentation. Even in this case, however, commencing the research stage requires that a research proposal be approved. The Professional Doctorate award cannot be granted until both stage 1 and stage 2 are certified complete by the relevant Committees.

To be eligible for an exit award a student will need to have met the following credit requirements:

Exit Qualification	Total Credits	Level 7	Level 8
Post Graduate Certificate	60	60 or above	
Post Graduate Diploma	120	120 or above	
Master’s Degree	180	180 or above	
Professional Doctorate	540	180	360

Professional doctorate programmes will incorporate a means of integration between the “structured” and independent parts of the programme. This should incorporate the development and assessment of reflective practice, the extension to boundaries of practice, the identification of new knowledge and the initiation of change.

Where it is considered that there is a case for diverging from the above requirements (for example to the meet the needs of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body), a justification must be presented as part

of the validation process. Deviations from the Professional Doctorate Regulations for a given course are subject to approval by the Academic Framework and Regulations sub-committee. Any agreed deviations must be clearly drawn to the attention of candidates in the course guide.

Professional doctorate programmes may incorporate the possibility for early transfer to MPhil or PhD. Where this is agreed transfer is restricted to the early stage of the research degree programme – i.e. before completion of the “Progression” stage. Upon transfer, students become subject to the research degree Regulations.

Research Skills Development workshops offered by the Doctoral College will contribute to all professional doctorate programmes and should be supplemented by additional Faculty based research skills development as students’ progress through the programme.

### **Accreditation of Prior Learning and Compensation**

Credits awarded for prior learning may be allocated notional credit through the University’s Recognition of Prior Learning procedures provided that the prior learning is of an appropriate level and volume, and that the intended learning outcomes of the module or modules from which the student is exempt are met by the prior achievement.

A minimum of 50% of the total credits required for the award must be studied with the University of Wolverhampton. This must include the substantive research aspects of the award, including the thesis.

The University of Wolverhampton does not permit compensation *between* modules at postgraduate level. This implies that the learning outcomes must be fully met in all modules that comprise a Postgraduate Diploma, Masters or Doctoral programme.

Compensation may be permitted *within* modules for the marginal failure of an assessment element, providing the overall learning outcomes of the module are met. If the module team takes the view at validation that students should be required to pass all the assessments for a module, then the assessments should be designated as components rather than elements.

### **Achievement of doctoral outcomes**

Learning Outcomes for the Award of Professional Doctorate:

- Substantial critical investigation and evaluation of a topic or set of related topics resulting in an independent and original contribution to practice and understanding in the field to which the topic belongs, and which is expressed in a work of publishable quality;
- Originality is demonstrated through the discovery of new facts or methodologies, through subjecting known facts or methodologies to new insights derived from investigation, and/or through the revision, confirmation or adaptation of existing theories or methodologies to the new circumstances described in the thesis;
- Evidence of systematic, thorough, current and detailed knowledge of the specific subject area of the research as well as the general context in which that subject area is located;
- Evidence of knowledge of an appropriate range of research methodologies and a critical evaluation of their merits;
- Evidence of an ability to develop new hypotheses or research questions that have the capacity to extend the frontier of knowledge of the discipline;
- Evidence of an ability to design, plan and implement a research programme to test, explore and evaluate these hypotheses or questions;
- Evidence of an ability to analyse critically one’s own findings and those of others.

A substantial research report, normally in the form of a thesis, will form the final stage of all professional doctorate programmes. Where stipulated at validation, a portfolio of evidence is an appropriate alternative format for the development of doctoral level professional outcomes, and may be assessed alongside the thesis.

Examination arrangements will include a *viva voce* examination of the thesis and related professional aspects to determine that the overall achievement is at an appropriate level. The research presented must represent an independent and original contribution to knowledge, understanding or practice in the field of study.

On completion of a doctoral programme students will be awarded a degree with a specialist title approved at validation (e.g. Doctor of Counselling Psychology, Doctor of Biomedical Science).

Distinction grades will be available for all modules comprising a doctoral programme with the exception of the doctoral thesis and, where awarded, will appear on the University transcript. However, there is no provision for the award of a professional doctorate with Distinction.

### **Assessment in Professional Doctorate programmes**

At validation of a Masters or Doctoral programme, a range of assessment methods will be determined. Assessment tasks will be linked to the demonstration of module learning outcomes derived from the designated programme outcomes.

Explicit criteria will be used to determine (as a minimum) the threshold performance, and other grades of performance within the overall postgraduate grade scheme. The credit tariff for each module will normally indicate the assessment volume (quantity), and assessment criteria linked to grades, will determine the expected quality of students' work.

To achieve a Doctorate, students must be awarded 540 credits with no compensation permitted. The nature of doctoral study is often predominantly independent in nature, and this is one indicator of study at this level. Despite the fact that doctoral programmes are structured within the modular framework, a significant proportion of the credit awarded may reflect substantial individually negotiated study, much of which is practice-based.

Candidates on a Professional Doctorate course are required to pass all modules. The pass mark for all taught modules shall be 50%.

There is no provision for the repetition of a "thesis module".

### **Assessment of Professional Doctorate theses**

Doctoral thesis topics will be approved by the Faculty Research Student Board (RSB) using a research proposal form. The approval process will take account of the rigour of the project proposal and the experience of the supervisors at doctoral level.

All professional doctorate theses will be examined by at least one external and one internal examiner. The internal examiner(s) may not have had any input to the research being examined and may not be one of the supervisors. Additional examiners will be appointed when the candidate is a member of staff (in which case a second external examiner will be appointed) and where it is necessary to ensure full coverage of the discipline being examined (in which case there may be an additional internal or external examiner).

Examiners for the doctoral thesis will be considered initially by RSBs before submission to the RASC using the nomination form for examiners of research degrees. Thesis external examiners must be able to demonstrate independence from the University, they may examine a maximum of two theses in any one year and they will not, under normal circumstances, undertake doctoral thesis examining for the University of Wolverhampton in consecutive years. To preserve the independence of the Award External Examiner, doctoral thesis examiners may not concurrently be appointed as Award examiners.

RASC will appoint an independent Chair for all thesis *viva voce* examinations. The examination panel will consist of a Chair, an internal examiner and at least one external examiner. The student's supervisor may, with the student's permission, be present as an observer. Where the candidate is a member of staff, two external examiners will normally be required.

A preliminary written examiners' report(s) will be followed, if appropriate, by a *viva voce* examination. Following a Professional Doctorate oral examination, the Examiners will be asked to make one of the following recommendations:

- Pass.
- Pass, subject to minor corrections
- Re-submit and/or be re-examined orally for the degree originally submitted
- Fail. The Student has no further opportunity for submission.

In the case of the examiners recommending that a thesis be re-submitted (a Retrievable Fail) the student must revise the thesis and submit for re-examination within 12 months. At the time of the first examination, the examiners may determine that the student undergo a further *viva voce* examination following the resubmission.

In exceptional cases, where the examiners judge that the thesis is so unsatisfactory that no useful purpose will be served by conducting an oral examination they may recommend that the thesis be resubmitted. This would require resubmission of the thesis within 12 months at which time the resubmitted thesis would be assessed and a *viva voce* examination would then take place.

A thesis being assessed on resubmission may only be graded as follows: Pass; Pass with minor amendments; Fail. To remain eligible for the award, a revised thesis must be resubmitted within 12 months.

A candidate cannot be failed outright without the opportunity to defend his/her thesis in a *viva voce* examination. In the event of failure of a resubmitted thesis, there is no option for further resubmission.

In the event of failure of the thesis the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board may consider a candidate for an interim award within the programme. In this event, candidates must fulfil all the requirements for the alternate award, including submission of a satisfactory research project/dissertation.

### **Assessment and Progression Boards**

Module grades will be confirmed at Module Boards and published to students. Eligibility for a final (or intermediate) award will be determined at the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board, who will also determine eligibility for the award of Distinction (at Masters Level).

Progression within a postgraduate programme, to the Masters stage and beyond, will be determined at the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board.

External examiners will be appointed at "Subject" (i.e. module) and "Award" (i.e. Programme) levels.

An Award external examiner will be appointed for each Professional Doctorate course to provide feedback on the overall standard of the award; its coherence; and the extent that the outcomes are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements.

However, the formal approval of all grades is the responsibility of the Subject examiner (for the "taught" modules) and the thesis examiners (in the case of the thesis). The Award External Examiner has overall responsibility for confirming standards on the programme as a whole (as for Masters programmes).

In arriving at decisions about performance at Programme level, the Award External Examiner consider both the taught and the research components of the Professional Doctorate course and will provide an annual report to the University. The Award External Examiner will have access to the following information to inform the annual report:

- All assessed work, including the thesis and the Thesis Examiner's reports
- The outcome of the Annual Progress Review of candidates in Stage 2 of the course
- Student feedback:
  - course level
  - individual module level
  - PRES survey, as appropriate
- Feedback from the Course Committee
- Feedback from other committees e.g. RASC.

In the interests of efficiency it may be appropriate to "combine" the Professional Doctorate Module Boards and Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board - where this occurs or if the Boards run in close succession, they may be convened and minuted as one board. In this case module grades must be confirmed before moving on to consider progression and award conferment. A combined board must include External Examiner input at subject and award levels as appropriate.

The Course Leader will write an annual report, which reviews and evaluates: student, staff and examiner views on the course; annual progress review forms of students on stage two of the course; data concerning admissions, progression and destinations; and on this basis presents an action plan for the coming year. The report will cover both the taught component and the research component of the Professional Doctorate course. These reports will be passed to the Professional Doctorate Award & Progression Board for comments, before being reported to the University Research Committee.

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